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THE LIFE OF
Countess Anna Orlova-Chesmenskaya
THE NUN AGNIA IN SECRET TONSURE

By N. ELAGIN*

I.

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God! . . . With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God (Mark 10:26-27).

COUNTESS ANNA Alekseyevna Orlova was the only daughter of the famous hero of the battle of Chesma in Russia's war with Turkey in 1770, Count Alexis Grigorievich Orlov, to whose surname Empress Catherine II gave the honorary addition of "Chesmensk". She was born on May 2, 1785, and the next year she lost her mother, Countess Avdotia Nikolaevna, who died in Moscow at the age of 25 while giving birth to a son, who himself died within a year.

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* Translated from the author's book, *The Life of Countess Anna Alekseyevna Orlova-Chesmenskaya,* St. Petersburg, 1853, with abridgements as in the text printed by Archimandrite Vitaly of Pochaev in his periodical *The Russian Monk,* Pochaev Monastery, 1912, nos. 15 and 16. Material on Archimandrite Photius added from his *Autobiography,* printed in installments in the periodical *Russkaya Starina,* March, 1894, and later issues.

Countess Anna Orlova-Chesmenskaya

After the death of his wife Count Alexis concentrated all his attention on the upbringing of his daughter. As teachers for her he brought in educated men who joined to enlightened intellects a purity of morals and religiousness, the foundation stone of education.

For his part in the war against Napoleon in 1806, he was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir. Then, ending his days in Moscow with his daughter in undisturbed peace, Count Alexis died on December 24, 1808, after a short illness, in the 72nd year of his life.

Countess Anna, who until then had not known sorrow or grief, was

Archimandrite Photius

overwhelmed by her father's death and fainted, remaining unconscious for 14 hours without any sign of life. No sooner had she (on awakening) put on a black mourning dress, than, in the presence of others, she went to the icons and, falling on her knees, uttered these words with sobs: "Oh Lord! Thou hast taken my mother whom I never knew, and now it has been pleasing to Thee to take my father. Then be for me in place of mother and father and direct all the steps of my life." This prayer, uttered from the depths of a pure heart with complete faith and hope in God, received the blessing of God for all the remainder of her life.

The young Countess sought consolation in prayer and set off to venerate the saints in the Kiev Caves Lavra and in Rostov. At the tomb of St. Demetrius, at the Rostov Monastery, she met an elder, Hieromonk Amphilocius, who was renowned for his piety and ascetic life. This pious elder, by his edifying counsels and instruction, had a decisive influence on the Countess. He conversed with her about humility, mercy, the vanity of the goods of this world, prayer, patience, the power of faith. He spoke, as always, with sincere tears in his eyes. Conversing with him, the Countess felt more strongly a coldness toward worldly happiness, the vanity of worldly amusements, and the insolidity of everything that a man creates for himself for temporal life.

From Fr. Amphilocius' cell the Countess brought the firm conviction that life here is only a preparation for the future life, that the goods of the present life should be for us nothing else than a means for obtaining eternal goods, that neither wealth nor fame nor splendor can give true rest to the human spirit, and that only active faith and love towards God can furnish peace to the soul here and a blessed life in eternity. Having come to love the holy things of Rostov and having reverence towards Fr. Amphilocius, the Countess every year until 1820, and perhaps longer, travelled to Rostov during Great Lent, prepared for and received Holy Communion there, and spent the bright days of the feast of Pascha.

One may say with certainty that from the moment of her meeting with Hieromonk Amphilocius, a new life began for Countess Anna, a life full of self-denial, piety, and charitable deeds, a life which is an instructive example, not for her glory, but for the common benefit.

During the life and after the death of the devout Fr. Amphilocius, Countess Anna went unwaveringly on the path which he pointed out. To remain in prayer, to be occupied with the thought of God, to flee from vain worldly enjoyments — these became her first concern and chief need. Having inherited an immense wealth, she made it her rule not to use the wealth for herself, but for God. Thus, desiring in accordance with the Gospel to become wealthy towards God, she spared nothing for the sake of His churches, of monasteries, and her neighbor, pouring out benefactions openly and in secret. These outward sacrifices and visible gifts she united to a remarkable ability to hide everything good that she did for her own salvation, without contradicting the propriety of worldly intercourse in society.

Having put away from herself all self-love, forgetting her noble origin, her superior education and upbringing, her numerous acquaintances among the best people in high society, and enjoying the special good will of the imperial

family, the Countess was constantly distinguished by her exceeding humility. Grand and pleasant ot look at, with an expression of extraordinary affability, simple in conversation, modest in words, with a Christian pleasantness in contact with others, attentive to each and all without distinction of origin, rank, or age — these qualities clearly expressed her exalted soul. No one ever saw her angry or disagreeable. Her very grief over the death of her father, and her feeling of orphanhood, were turned little by little into a ceaseless striving towards God, filled with the most exalted hope and love.

Crowds of paupers daily surrounded her house, and not one of them left without help and consolation. The Countess did not wish to know who was asking her help, or for what; she did constant good deeds in the name of God and to the glory of the Saviour, awaiting from Him mercy for herself.

She accepted everything in life, joyful and sorrowful, pleasant and unpleasant, with the same submission and devotion to God and to His holy will. She gave thanks to God equally for everything, and she saw the hand of His wondrous Providence equally in everything. Whether in the execution of worldly matters or in her daily labors and struggles of piety, she was the same in patience. She was so fervent in prayer that she almost never felt tired, even though she would remain on her knees for whole hours before the holy icons.

II.

HAVING MADE a firm decision to consecrate her life to God and neighbor, the Countess, knowing how difficult is the path of Christian perfection, desired after the death of Hieromonk Amphilocius to find another guide, known for sanctity of life, to whom she might turn for counsel in temptations, and from whom she might receive instruction in living.

Such a guide was indicated to her by Bishop Innocent of Penza and Saratov, who was renowned for his pious life and Christian knowledge. His ascetic life and the power of his preaching made his name known throughout Russia and attracted the Countess' special attention. Informed of his arrival in Moscow on the way to Penza, as well as of his severe illness, the Countess hastened to receive his blessing; she visited him and entreated him, for more convenient treatment, to move into her home, putting it at his complete disposal. Further, she importunately begged him to indicate to her an instructor in spiritual life. The bishop named Hieromonk Photius of Petersburg, his former student at the Theological Academy, and now a teacher of religion himself. The remarkable Christian death of Bishop Innocent, which occurred shortly there-

after (1819), established his words yet more firmly in the Countess' heart. She decided absolutely to entrust herself to her chosen instructor, and she did not abandon her good intention.

III.

HIEROMONK PHOTIUS, born Peter Spassky, on June 7, 1792, in a village of the Novgorod region, was the the son of poor parents of the clergy calling. After attending the Novgorod Seminary, he entered the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in 1814. A chest ailment (which later caused his death) prevented him from finishing the course of the Academy, but he was still able to enter the clergy ranks. The rector of the St. Petersburg seminary, Archimandrite Innocent (soon to become Bishop of Penza) took him under his immediate protection and guidance, and the young Peter became his faithful disciple. He was a student also of Archimandrite Philaret (later Metropolitan of Moscow), who was then Rector of the Theological Academy.

For a year and a half Peter was a teacher in the St. Alexander Nevsky spiritual school, and in 1817 he became a teacher of religion in the Second Military Academy, at the same time being tonsured a monk and immediately being ordained Hierodeacon and Hieromonk. He was not only a teacher, but also a true spiritual father for his pupils, who greatly loved him.

At the time when Countess Anna met Hieromonk Photius, the Russian capital of St. Petersburg was in the midst of a veritable inundation of "mystical" and pseudo-Christian ideas coming from the West together with the "enlightened" philosophy that had produced the French Revolution. Masonic lodges and other secret societies abounded; books containing the gnostic and millenarian fantasies of Jacob Boehme, Jung-Stilling, Eckhartshausen, and other Western "mystics" were freely translated into Russian and printed for distribution in all the major cities of the realm; "ecumenical" salons spread a vague teaching of an "inner Christianity" to the highest levels of Russian society; the press censorship was under the direction of the powerful Minister of Spiritual Affairs, Count Galitsyn, who patronized every "mystical" current and stifled the voice of traditional Orthodoxy by his dominance of the Holy Synod as Procurator; the Tsar Alexander himself, fresh from his victory over Napoleon and the formation of a vaguely religious "Holy Alliance" of Western powers, favored the new religious currents and consulted with "prophetesses" and other religious enthusiasts; and the bishops and other clergy who saw what was going on were reduced to helpless silence in the face of the prevailing current of the times and the Government's support of it, which promised exile and disgrace for anyone who opposed

it. Many even of those who regarded themselves as sincere Orthodox Christians were swept up in the spiritual "enthusiasm" of the times, and, trusting their religious feelings more than the Church's authority and tradition, were developing a new spirituality, foreign to Orthodoxy, in the midst of the Church itself. Thus, one lady of high birth, Ekaterina P. Tatarinova, claimed to have received the gift of "prophecy" on the very day she was received into the Orthodox Church (from Protestantism), and subsequently she occupied the position of a "charismatic" leader of religious meetings which included the singing of masonic and sectarian hymns (while holding hands in a circle), a peculiar kind of dancing and spinning when the "Holy Spirit" would come upon them, and actual "prophecy" — sometimes for hours at a time. The members of such groups fancied that they drew closer to the traditions of Orthodoxy by such meetings, which they regarded as a kind of restoration of the New Testament Church for "inward" believers, the "Brotherhood in Christ", as opposed to the "outward" Christians who were satisfied with the Divine services of the Orthodox Church. One fervent Orthodox Christian of this time, Alexander P. Dubovitsky, remarked concerning Tatarinova and her assemblies: "How easy it is, especially at the present time, without a deep-rooted humility, without a complete renunciation of worldly lusts and a pure, altruistic love, to be converted into a society of magicians clothed in all the appearances of true Christianity. Covering oneself with the false mysticism of today, being adorned with all spiritual gifts — with prophecy, the exorcism of demons, miraculous powers — one can draw many into very dangerous nets," even while being convinced that one is in the closest union with Christ. This revival of the perennial "charismatic" temptation in the Church, together with a vague "revolutionary" spirit imported from the West, presented a danger not merely to the preservation of true Christianity in Russia, but to the very survival of the whole order of Church and State. Very few saw this at the time, and Father Photius was destined to be a solitary champion of Orthodoxy against the false mysticism, until he persuaded the Tsar himself to take arms against it.

Countess Anna found in Fr. Photius not only a spiritual father and (as we shall see) a helper in her charitable deeds; one of the chief things that attracted her to him was precisely his fight for Orthodoxy. Later she wrote: "He drew my attention by the boldness and fearlessness with which he, being a teacher of religion in the Military Academy, a young monk, began to accuse the reigning errors in faith. Everyone was against him, beginning with the Court. He did not fear this . . . His letters seemed to me as some kind of apostolic epistles. Coming to know him better, I became convinced that he sought nothing at all

for himself personally." Countess Anna thus quite consciously became Photius' chief ally in the battle for the purity of Orthodoxy, giving her money abundantly for this cause, and serving by her example of a humble, truly Christian life as a kind of antipodes to the "charismatic" Tatarinova and other "prophetesses".

The departure of Archimandrite Innocent from Petersburg, while ostensibly a "promotion" to the rank of Bishop, was actually an exile caused by his falling out of favor at the Imperial Court owing to his expression of opposition to the "mystical" views then in fashion. The subsequent death of Bishop Innocent, within a few months of reaching his see of Penza, so affected Fr. Photius that he asked permission to retire for a while to the remote monastery of Konevits on Lake Ladoga, north of Petersburg. Here for the first time he saw the strict monastic life at its best: the rule of life was truly coenobitic, with everything in common; the church Typicon of services was strictly kept, with singing done in the ancient Znamenny chant; the monks themselves were sober and silent. Here the dream was born in the heart of Fr. Photius one day to establish such a monastery himself. Later, when he became Archimandrite at the Yuriev monastery in Novgorod and rebuilt this ancient monastery, perhaps the chief adornment he gave to it was the institution there of the ancient monastic rule of life which he had seen at Konevits.

In 1821, Photius was appointed Abbot of the Derevyanitsky monastery in Novgorod, which in a short time, with the aid of Countess Anna, he totally restored from a state of poverty and near destruction. The next year he was transferred to another Novgorod monastery, that of Skovorodsky, which he also restored from a similar state. At the end of the same year of 1822 he was again transferred, this time to become Archimandrite in the Yuriev (St. George) monastery in Novgorod, a famous and ancient monasery (11th century) which was then in a state of total decline. Here he was to spend the rest of his life, totally renewing this monastery both inwardly and outwardly.

Personally, his heart desired the desert life of the ancient Fathers. Even in the midst of the splendor of the restored monastery in which he lived, he led the life of a recluse, increasing his strictness with each new year. During the Great Lent he would not speak at all. His fasting was extreme, and in his last years he knew no other food than prosphora from church and sometimes the simplest kind of porridge, with no drink but water. He was the first to enter church, and the last to leave; he himself tended the always-burning lamps before the main icons of the Saviour and the Mother of God. He had a small prayer cell in the monastery where he would come every midnight, and every day at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, in order to weep and pray; here his soul was

exalted to heaven, and the desire flamed brightly to live only for heaven and eternity.

Yet his very position, as well as the needs of the times, required him to take also an active part in public affairs. Wih special Christian zeal he would preach every Sunday and feast day. He would speak from the heart, and his words were lively and effective. Above all, he was a ceaseless combatant in the battle against un-Orthodox ideas, and several times he was called to Petersburg on this account.

Western historians invariably caricature Photius as a fierce "fanatic" bound up with the "dark forces of reaction" in Russia. His own autobiography, however — written at the request of Countess Anna — reveals him to be not merely a sincere and zealous defender of Orthodoxy, but also a person quite well read in the "mystical" literature of his time, whose main ideas he correctly identified and exposed. In his early years as a student and young teacher in Petersburg, he approached this literature warily, being drawn to it at first by a natural curiosity to see what it was that "everyone" was reading and becoming so excited about. He began with the *Path to Christ* of Jacob Boehme (concerning whom at first he did not know whether he might be some "St. Jacob" of the Orthodox Church, or a non-Orthodox writer), then a commentary on the Apocalypse by Jung-Stilling. Later he read many such books and compiled a collection of many extracts from them, together with a commentary on their un-Orthodox and anti-Christian ideas, which he presented to Tsar Alexander. Seeing that (as he himself wrote) "the enemies were preparing to introduce some new kind of Bible religion," Fr. Photius publicly attacked not merely the masonic lodges and other secret societies, but even the Government-sponsored Bible Society, whose aim was not merely to print the Scriptures in Russian, but also to spread a vague "inter-denominational" Christianity in place of Orthodoxy. He openly proclaimed that "the masonic faith is of Antichrist, and its whole teaching and writings are of the devil."

This public activity naturally drew the attention of Tsar Alexander, who in the last years of his reign had begun to turn his back on the "liberalism" of his youth, and he asked to see him privately. Archimandrite Photius records two long interviews with the Tsar, together with numerous documents and appeals which he sent to him; there can be no doubt that the influence of Fr. Photius on the Tsar was great, and indeed decisive. After the first interview, wherein he warned the Tsar against the secret societies that were undermining the foundations of Church and State, called on him to be a defender of Orthodoxy, and begged him to forbid the secret societies — within a few weeks there fol-

lowed Alexander's decree closing all the masonic lodges and similar gatherings. After the second interview the Tsar, on Photius' advice, took further steps in forbidding the distribution of anti-Orthodox books and exiling their authors. He accepted the appeal which Fr. Photius made to him: "God conquered the visible Napoleon who invaded Russia; may He conquer also the spiritual Napoleon through you!"

Alexander I was himself too much bound by the mistakes of his youth to follow the new policy of "reaction" to the end. For years he had desired to put down the reins of government, and there is much circumstantial evidence to support the widespread belief in Russia that he staged his own "death" at a remote town in the south of Russia and lived the last 39 years of his life as a recluse-ascetic under the name of "Fyodor Kuzmich." The new conservative policy which Nicholas, Alexander's brother and successor, consistently followed for the next thirty years, probably postponed Russia's revolution by at least fifty years and preserved the Orthodox Church in Russia from the movement of "ecumenical" Christianity. In view of all this, one need not be surprised at the recorded statement of "Fyodor Kuzmich" that Archimandrite Photius was the "savior of Russia." Certainly no man in Russia had labored more than Photius with the conscious intention of reversing the "liberal" trend of the first part of the reign of Alexander I.

After the "death" of Tsar Alexander in 1825, Archimandrite Photius seldom left the Yuriev monastery, occupying himself with the restoration work on it, continuing his strict ascetic life, and being to all a father, benefactor, and defender in time of misfortune. Several cases of his grace-given clairvoyance have been recorded, and he was known as somewhat of a "fool for Christ's sake" because of his sometimes unpredictable behavior. His constant wish during his last days was: "May all the earth be saved, I wish all to be saved." He died on February 26, 1838, and was buried by all the clergy of Novgorod (in white vestments, in accordance with his testament), accompanied by the loud lamentations of his spiritual flock.

IV.

LEAVING HER NATIVE Moscow and settling in Petersburg, the Countess sought an occasion to get close to Hieromonk Photius, but for a long time he avoided her, as if fearing the influence of her fame and wealth. It was no less than two years before the Countess attained her desired aim to be his spiritual daughter (in 1822). We know from the papers which she left after her death that she chose Photius as her spiritual guide likewise at the advice of

Metr. Seraphim, to whom she often appealed for guidance after the death of Bishop Innocent, and who had been the first bishop to defend Fr. Photius in his battle for Orthodoxy. The Countess settled near the Yuriev monastery, placing upon herself a vow of obedience and the strictest self-denial. She visited the church of God without fail every day, and she did not pass by a single opportunity to make an offering to the church.

In all her qualities of soul and in all her outward actions she manifested the example of a life hidden in God, a life pious and ascetic, worthy of emulation, filled with active love of neighbor and good deeds.

Moving her place of residence as close as possible to the Yuriev monastery, she sought a local opportunity for the work of piety. She hoped, under the supervision of her spiritual father, the more faithfully to fulfill Christian labors of goodness and prayer a certain distance away from the light. Thus the delicate vine, striving upwards by the calling of its nature, seeks support for itself and does not abandon it even after it attains a considerable height and becomes apparently quite firm.

Moving into her refuge near Yuriev monastery, the Countess led a life even stricter than before, dedicating herself completely to labors of piety, abstinence, fasting, prayer and almsgiving. She dedicated to God both her wealth and her soul and body; visibly and gradually she finally became that which her blessed Christian death revealed her to be.

Living almost constantly near the Yuriev monastery for over 25 years, she daily, especially in later years, attended the Vigil service and the early Liturgy in the lower church of the Praise of the Mother of God, with a litia every day and a panikhida on Saturday (except feast days) for her parents and (after 1838) the reposed Archimandrite Photius. She considered him also as her father, because he had trained her in spiritual life.

During the Great Lent, the Countess went to the general Divine services in the church of the All-Merciful Saviour. In Great Lent she spent the greater part of the day in church, and at night she gave herself over to solitary prayer at home. At this time her abstinence in food reached the fasting of the ancient solitaries: during the first week of the Fast she ate nothing until Saturday except for prosphora and warm wine in church on Wednesdays and Fridays after the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, and in Passion Week she ate food only on Great Thursday. She received communion of the Holy Mysteries every Saturday and Sunday; on these days she would get up at two o'clock in the morning and be the first in church for Matins at three o'clock. The day on which she was vouchsafed communion of the Holy Mysteries she always called a day

of blessedness and spiritual solemnity; she thirsted only for the manna of heaven, the fount of eternal life, for which she cast away wealth, enjoyment of the world, honors and all earthly conveniences. Even on the days when the Church does not prescribe fasting and allows more nourishing food, the Countess did not allow herself to take advantage of the offered freedom, but would not eat meat or milk products; and she would eat fish only when it is allowed by the Church Typicon.

While renouncing the satisfactions of worldly life, Countess Anna did not cut off all contact with society, but bore the obligations placed upon her by her high calling. From the age of seven she was a Lady-in-Waiting to the Empresses and was characterized by a special devotion to the Imperial Family. In 1826 she accompanied Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna to the Coronation of Nicholas I in Moscow, and remained with her the whole time of the solemnities there. In 1828 she accompanied the Empress to Odessa and Kiev, and later went abroad with her to Warsaw and Berlin. While in Petersburg and Moscow she lived in accordance with the demands placed upon her by her social position. She willingly received guests in her home, but she herself did not like to go visiting. In society and in conversation, the Countess neither in word or manner gave any indication of the strict life which she led in silence for God and the salvation of her soul. Those who saw her only in drawing rooms did not even suspect that she spent the greater part of her time in prayer and devout labors.

During any free time she would read the Psalms of David, the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours, the Akathists to the Saviour and the Mother of God, to the Great Martyr Barbara and other saints, and the canon to the Guardian Angel. Every midnight she would get up and repeat twelve times the prayer, "Rejoice, Theotokos Virgin, full of grace." So as not to miss this desired minute, the Countess never slept before that time on her usual bed — which itself was a most simple and unenviable one — but on a special divan in her prayer room, directly opposite the icon of the Kazan Mother of God and other holy icons; and only after performing the midnight prayer would she go to her bedroom. Thus did the daughter of the renowned hero of Chesma spend her life.

During the Divine services in the lower church of the Praise of the Mother of God (in the Yuriev monastery), the Countess would always stand before the icon of the Mother of God, "The Unburnt Bush"; she loved to bow down before it and kiss Her footsteps. At the end of the church services she would usually venerate all the holy icons.

The Countess zealously visited also other holy places, God's churches, monasteries and lavras. She went twice to the Kiev Caves Lavra not long before

her death and stayed there a long time, having a special reverence for it as for a holy place of ancient Russia and the cradle of the Holy Orthodox faith in her fatherland.

During her pilgrimages to the Kiev Caves, Countess Anna made it a point to visit the holy men who lived nearby, notably the Elders Parthenius and Theophilus. The Life of the latter contains several encounters of this clairvoyant fool for Christ with the Countess, who had the greatest respect for him and was not at all put off by his "foolishness".

"Even the renowned philanthropist and deeply believing woman, Countess Anna Alekseyevna Orlova-Chesmenskaya, was not always graciously received by the Elder. Once the Countess came to Fr. Theophilus on the advice of Metropolitan Philaret (of Kiev) and asked his blessing for the beginning of some important matter; but the Elder answered her not a word, but only gathered together in a corner of the room a pile of fine sweepings — and poured it out into the bottom of her dress. Orlova was so religious and had so much veneration for the blessed Elder, that she humbly left for home with this dirt and all the way reflected on the significance of what the Elder had done."

The "fine sweepings" undoubtedly refer to the cheap gossip and slanders which were constantly spread about this righteous woman; the Elder was thus pointing to her lot in life.

"Another time she came to him on the eve of the feast of the Dormition. The Elder had the custom of putting his cell in order on this day, and so Countess Orlova came upon him washing pots and dishes. Seeing her, the blessed one visibly rejoiced: 'Ah! The maiden, she has come, the maiden! Just in time, just at the right time . . . Please, my dear, go down to the Dnepr and wash a few little pots for me there . . .'

"And he handed her the dirtiest dishes he had.

"Anna Alekseyevna only smiled and without any protest set off for the Dnepr, where, not doubting in the least, she zealously undertook to wash the pots, dirtied by time, with her own hands, which were adorned with precious rings. Her servant stood respectfully a distance away and gave himself over to astonishment, seeing the Countess at such a dirty and comical work."

Another time, "Countess Orlova-Chesmenskaya came to Kiev on a pilgrimage and, having finished the labor of worshipping, came to Elder Theophilus in order to confess to him. She did not find him in his cell, but catching sight of him in the monastery courtyard, she set out towards him. Having

guessed Orlova's intention, the blessed one wished to test her humility and, as if not noticing the Countess, he quickly set off into the forest. Orlova, not wishing to lose sight of the Elder, who rarely appeared among people, followed his steps . . . The Elder increased his pace, and Orlova followed . . . Making sharp turns, now going to the side — so that Countess Orlova sometimes lost him from view, then again found the Elder walking in the distance — Blessed Theophilus made his way to the Novopasechny garden and, entering the gate, instantly was hidden from view. The agitated Countess, having lost his trail, stopped in indecision, but to her good fortune the novice-recruit N. was sitting at the garden gate, and she came up to him and asked: 'Tell me, please: didn't Fr. Theophilus pass by here?'

"'Yes, he just entered the garden,' the novice N. replied, bowing respectfully, and opened the gate for the Countess. 'If you please . . .'

"Beside herself from joy, Orlova took out of her purse a handful of gold and gave it to N. with gratitude." As it turns out, this money was just what the novice needed to buy off his military obligation and remain in the monastery; the Countess' meeting with him had been arranged by Blessed Theophilus' clairvoyance. (Vladimir Znosko, *Schema-Hieromonk Theophilus,* Jordanville, 1962, pp. 78-79, 112-113; see English translation, Jordanville, 1970, pp. 64, 92.)

Concerning Father Parthenius, who is evidently the priest who tonsured her, an incident has been preserved which is reminiscent of the experience of St. Melania, as recorded in the *Lausiac History* (ch. 10), when she brought a basket of silver to Elder Pambo. Seeing she was not praised by him for this, she informed him that the basket contained 300 pounds; but to this he only replied: "My daughter, He to Whom you have offered the money has no need to know the weight . . . Hold your peace."

Similarly, we read of Fr. Parthenius that "being withdrawn from everything earthly, he considered worldly acquirements a sin. The things brought to him he would tie in a bundle and carry out to the road. Once Countess Anna Orlova, on her knees before him, said, 'Father, how can I console you? — I will not spare millions.' He replied: 'What kind of consolation is that? What good is this manure to me?'" ("Faith and Life," St. Elias Publications, no. 11, Forestville, Calif., p. 9.)

She loved to converse with people who were pious and rich in experience, about the struggles of God's saints, about the places of their struggle, about

the holy city of Jerusalem and Mt. Athos. She had always wished to go to Jerusalem and venerate the Holy Sepulchre. With contrition of soul she would converse about the places sanctified by the footsteps of the Saviour and the dwelling there of the Most Pure Virgin Mother of God, and about the spread of the Christian faith.

The Countess' piety served as a source of pure, total love for neighbor. Burning with love for God, she saw brethren in Christ in all her near ones and did not spare anything for them. Truly pious in soul, at the same time she was not flattered either by human praises or by worldly glory. She gave to God and neighbor out of an invincible attraction of soul, because she felt in this an absolute need; she gave both openly and in secret, as the occasion arose, with a constancy that was truly astonishing. The best witnesses of this truth were not merely the Yuriev monastery, which she raised up from ruins, adorned and enriched, but also all our lavras, all the Russian monasteries and the monasteries of the Holy Mountain of Athos, cathedral churches, a multitude of other churches, all her care for the poor among the clergy — all of these were endowed whether with contributions or with adornments and improvements.

All of these outward contributions, all of these visible gifts to the glory of God, for the adornment of monasteries and churches and for the benefit of the poor, were joined to a special inward humility and with an extraordinary friendliness towards everyone.

She received alike rich and poor, the most famous and the most insignificant in society; both equally enjoyed a cordial reception from her, if only she did not find them too foreign to her in spirit.

The Countess was never carried away by anger or dissatisfaction. A remarkable ability to keep possession of herself was developed in her from her youngest years, and with time it became ever more firmly established, especially in her solitude at Yuriev, where she did not encounter anything that might disturb or agitate her soul.

Whenever conditions would call for strictness and severity, she preferred to use Christian patience and condescension to the weakness of her neighbor.

The obligations of her calling she always fulfilled with precision. She was patient in all her actions; she performed Christian struggles without vainglory and knew no obstacles to showing mercy. Demanding every day from her bookkeeper an account of expenses, she did this in order to see the measure to which she could make benefactions the next day to God's glory.

The poor flocked to the Countess from all directions. They appeared every day, morning and evening, were joyfully satisfied in everything and were sent away with alms.

But the chief of her offerings were those contributed for the benefit of monasteries, which the Countess considered a sacred depository of the Church's laws and piety. In them had ended their earthly life the greater part of the saints glorified by miracles in the Orthodox Church. She directed her special attention to the Yuriev monasery in Novgorod, and for a special reason: after the death of her father, she placed upon herself a vow to establish some kind of significant God-pleasing institution in memory of and for the salvation of the souls of her parents and her ancestors. This she was able to do in the restoration of the ancient Yuriev monastery from a state of utter poverty, with the blessing of Metr. Seraphim of Petersburg and through the efforts of her spiritual father, Archimandrite Photius, who was appointed abbot of the monastery in 1822. Through her contributions three churches were built and the whole monastery restored, and through Archimandrite Photius the coenobitic rule and church services according to the Typicon were brought into exemplary order.

If one goes beyond the boundaries of Russia, there also the abundant almsgiving of Countess Anna is evident. The Patriarchal church of the Life-giving Spring in Constantinople, through her generous aid, was restored in splendor. In Alexandria and Damascus both Patriarchal churches were adorned with valuable iconostases sent by her. The Holy Land and the Holy Mountain of Athos know her well as their benefactress, who covered the Orthodox East with her abundant alms. Everywhere there the name of Countess Anna resounded like that of the ancient Melania. She herself was distressed only at the fame that came to her for this, and almost grieved when she received letters of gratitude from the Patriarchs — so great was her humility. How much glory there was here, not only for her, but also for Russia as a whole.

During her life Countess Anna is known to have given some 25 million rubles (worth many times that amount in today's dollars) to monasteries and churches, and untold other millions for the poor and other benefactions. At her death she left 5000 rubles to each of 340 monasteries, with much more to several monasteries; 3000 rubles each to 48 cathedrals; and 6000 rubles to each diocese in Russia for widows and orphans of the clergy.

It is doubtful that one can find a private person of any time or place who has made such an offering to God! Leafing through the chronicles of the charitable deeds of the wealthiest and most generous persons, never does one see

such significant sums, which would indeed seem like something from a fable if it were not for the fact that the memorials of the contributions and gifts of Countess Anna are still alive and whole. (Recently the Soviets have restored the Yuriev monastery and opened it to tourists.)

V.

Having lived about 64 years almost without illness, Countess Anna died on Tuesday, Oct. 5, 1848, in the very Yuriev monastery which she had always adorned and loved and in which, some years before her death, she had ordered a place prepared for her eternal repose.

The circumstances accompanying her Christian and truly instructive death were as unexpected and striking as they were significant and consoling. The angel of death did not inform her of his sudden appearance by a severe and long-lasting infirmity such as is usual at the separation of the soul from the body; rather, he appeared quietly and suddenly before her at the very time when everything had been prepared for her departure from life, and in the very place where it was safest and most consoling to entrust oneself to one's invisible guide into the distant world from which there is no return.

October 5 was the namesday of the reposed father of the Countess, Count Alexis Grigorievich, who was buried there at the porch of the main church of St. George. Being devoted to and filled with love for the memory of her father, Countess Anna prepared to receive communion of the Holy Mysteries on this day, not knowing, in her true piety and love towards God, any better tribute of love for her father than purity of soul, nor any better sacrifice than fervent prayer for the salvation of his soul.

With this aim, on the eve of this day, after attending the All-night Vigil with the rule of prayer for the reception of the Mystery of the Eucharist, and then making her confession in the cell of her spiritual father, who was sick at that time, she thus prepared herself to meet this day, which for her was a spiritually solemn one. On the same day, October 5, she intended to set out for Petersburg, without in the least feeling or even suspecting that this would be the last day for her here on earth, and that her way led far away, into the invisible world, to the Throne of Him Who reigns eternally. When morning came, no preparatory illness heralded the approach of death.

The Countess arose from sleep at the usual time quite awake and healthy, and at eight o'clock in the morning came to the Yuriev monastery to attend the early Liturgy at the church of All Saints. Her face revealed that as

usual she was joyful and at peace; indeed, joyfulness, with an inexpressible kindness in her gaze, was always one of her distinguishing characteristics.

The Superior of the Yureiv monastery, Archimandrite Manuel, served the Liturgy on this day, desiring to give Holy Communion to the Countess, the great benefactress of the monastery entrusted to him. In the church, which had once been the solitary cell of Archimandrite Photius, the Countess' Christian soul took delight in the Divine Food for the last time, as a pledge of eternal life and a preparation for the world above. After receiving communion of the Holy Mysteries and at the end of the Liturgy, the Countess went to bow down before the dust of her father at the porch of the church of St. George. There, at her request, the Superior served a panikhida for the reposed.

Having thus fulfilled the duty of piety and her daughterly obligation, the Countess after the panikhida returned home to her residence next to the monastery.

In the church of All Saints during the Liturgy there were present several persons, both clergy and laymen, who wished to bid farewell to her on the occasion of her departure for Petersburg.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, several hours before the hour of departure, the Countess came again to Yuriev monastery and went directly to the lower church of the Praise of the Most Holy Mother of God in order to attend a memorial service for Archimandrite Photius, which was likewise served by the Superior, together with the elder monks. During the service all the monks of the monastery gathered, out of special respect for the Countess, the monastery's benefactress. When the service was ended, Countess Anna, with her usual affability, said farewell to all present and received the blessing of the hieromonks for her journey. Then, having venerated the icons in the church, she went by herself to the cave where the tomb of Archimandrite Photius was located, as well as the marble vault for her own tomb, which she herself had arranged beforehand, and remained there longer than usual in fervent prayer. Then she again venerated the holy icons in the church and went a second time to the burial cave (something she had never done before), as if not wishing to part with this precious place of undisturbed repose. After leaving the cave and the church, the Countess, accompanied by her servant, again set off on foot for the grave of her father and again prayed before it with special fervor. From the porch of the church of St. George she went to the cell of her sick spiritual father so as to receive his blessing for the journey. A certain physician was with her spiritual father at this time; the Countess accepted some advice from him regarding the epidemic that was then raging, then received a blessing from her

spiritual father for the journey, together with some spiritual counsel, and after listening to the prayers for travellers seemed well and joyful.

From there the Countess went to the quarters of the Superior, Archimandrite Manuel. While entering the staircase, she felt a pressure in the chest and a bad cough; however, she reached the reception room without aid and sat down on the sofa, but immediately got up and hastened to venerate the Iberon Icon of the Mother of God, for which she had special reverence. This Icon was in the last of the Superior's rooms, immediately adjoining the winter church of the All-merciful Saviour. Having venerated the Icon, the Countess let herself down on a chair, then quickly moved to the sofa opposite the Icon of the Mother of God, and then began to complain about the ever greater pressure in her chest and the worsening cough. Noticing the extraordinary change in her face, Hieromonk Vladimir, who was there at the time, hastened to call the doctor.

No more than ten minutes passed before the Countess departed this life. Sitting on the sofa opposite the Icon of the Mother of God, gazing with faith and love on the merciful heavenly Queen, she uttered a final sigh and died quietly and painlessly, as if falling into a sweet sleep after great labors and struggle. Her death struck all present not so much with the fear that people usually feel when someone dies suddenly, but with some kind of inexpressible contrition.

Fulfilling the Countess' desire, Archimandrite Manuel, some minutes before her death, recited over her the prayer "Rejoice, Theotokos Virgin, full of grace," at the same time blessing the dying woman; and this prayer was the last she heard upon earth. This is the same prayer, as we already know, that the Countess repeated several times a day, for which she would leave off her rest at night and often rise from sleep.

Hieromonk Vladimir read over the Countess the prayers for the departure of the soul. She herself in her final struggle only managed to offer up several most contrite glances at the Iberon Icon of the Most Pure Mother of God, when finally her eyes and mouth closed and her hands fell down to her knees. The servant who was attending her fell down on his knees in astonishment before his mistress and drenched her feet with bitter, unaffected tears. Thus, at a quarter before six o'clock, Countess Anna was no longer among the living.

One cannot depict in words the whole depth of the grief and sorrow of the monks of Yuriev monastery, who had become used to seeing the Countess constantly in their church. Soon the sad news of her death spread through the

whole of vast Russia, and a great and sincere lamentation for her began among all who knew her. For five days from the time of her death, memorial services for her were celebrated almost constantly by Bishop Leonid, the Vicar of Novgorod, by Archimandrite Manuel, and by other Superiors from all the monasteries of Novgorod.

On Sunday, October 10, the funeral of Countess Anna was performed. From the church of St. George, in which the Liturgy was celebrated, the remains of the pious Countess were transferred with spiritual hymns to the lower church of the Praise of the Mother of God, where she had so much loved to pray, by the full assembly of the clergy of Novgorod, headed by the Bishop. Here they were placed in the marble vault, in a special cave next to the tomb of Archimandrite Photius. At the transferral of the coffin lamentations and groans resounded throughout the church and accompanied the reposed to the grave. From all sides could be heard: "Forgive us, forgive us, our mother and benefactress!"

VI.

POPULAR REPORT has it that Countess Anna was a secret nun. Now this can hardly be kept secret any more, nor should it be.

After the Countess' death, a large Altar-Gospel was found in her prayer room. This had served for her constant reading, and after her death it was acquired, together with other things of hers, by the Yuriev monastery. In this holy Gospel, which was covered with gold-plated silver adornments on red velvet, there was a curious inscription on the last page; from this it is clear that the Countess was in reality a nun. The inscription reads:

"May Christ bless your soul, sister in Christ EINGA: read this book, that you may understand in what consists the will of God and know his mysteries unforgettably with your heart. Pray also for me, and receive this holy gift from the hand of the Mother of God, from our Lady, the Abbess of the (Kiev) Caves, both mine and yours. Schema-Parthenius. 1845, August 22. Alleluia."

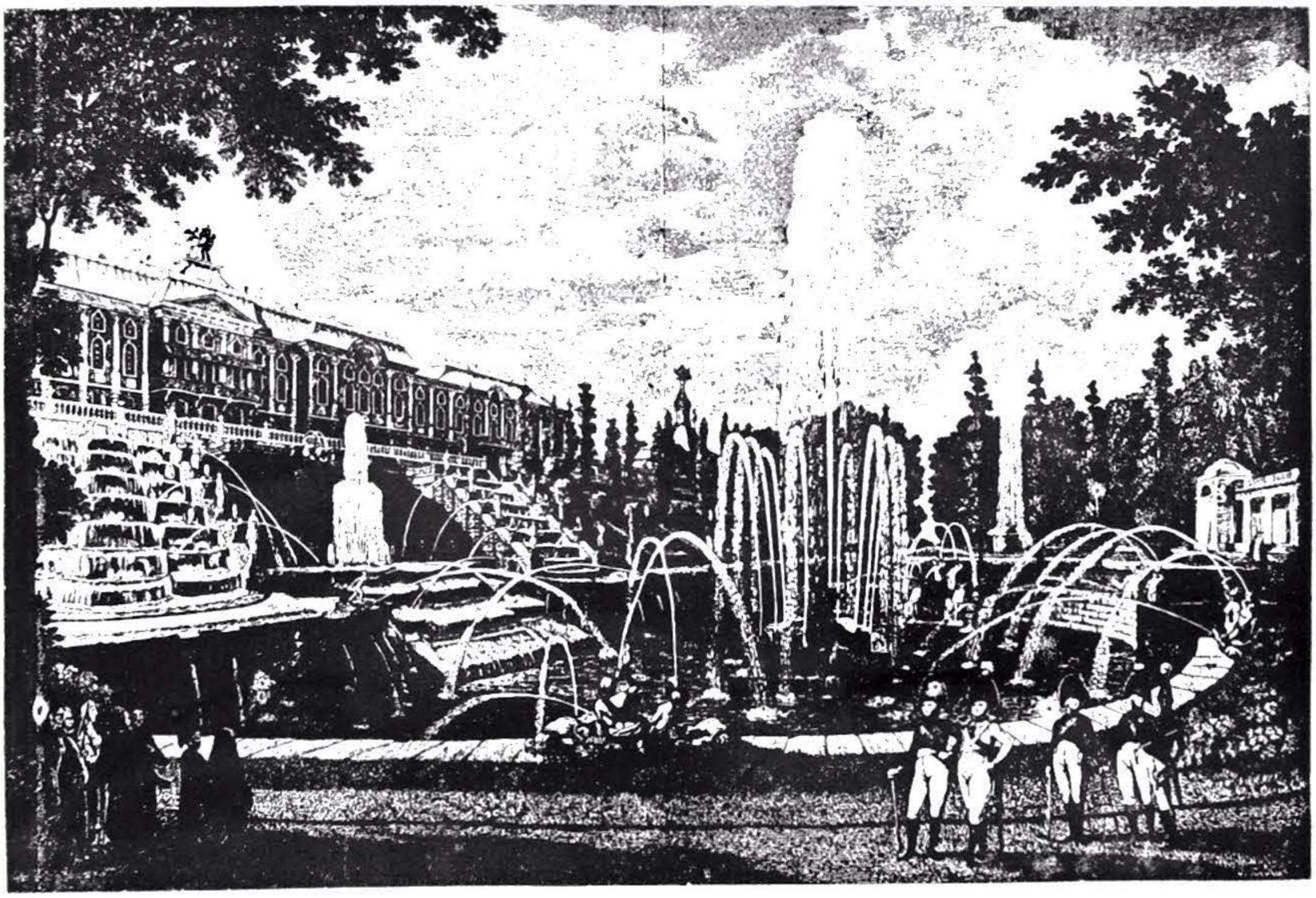
Here the name *Einga* is evidently the monastic name of the Countess — Agnia written backwards (in the vocative case — Agnie) in order to preserve the secret. This very name is written directly in the same Gospel, at the end, after the twelfth of the Passion Gospels. It was apparently written by the hand of Parthenius (the renowned elder of the Kiev Caves), who probably was the one who tonsured the Countess. Here first the words "the end" are written with ink; then something like a flower is drawn; and under it, side by side, appear in Slavonic letters the names: *Parthenius Agnia.*

Yuriev Monastery

General View of Yuriev Monastery

Count Alexis Orlov

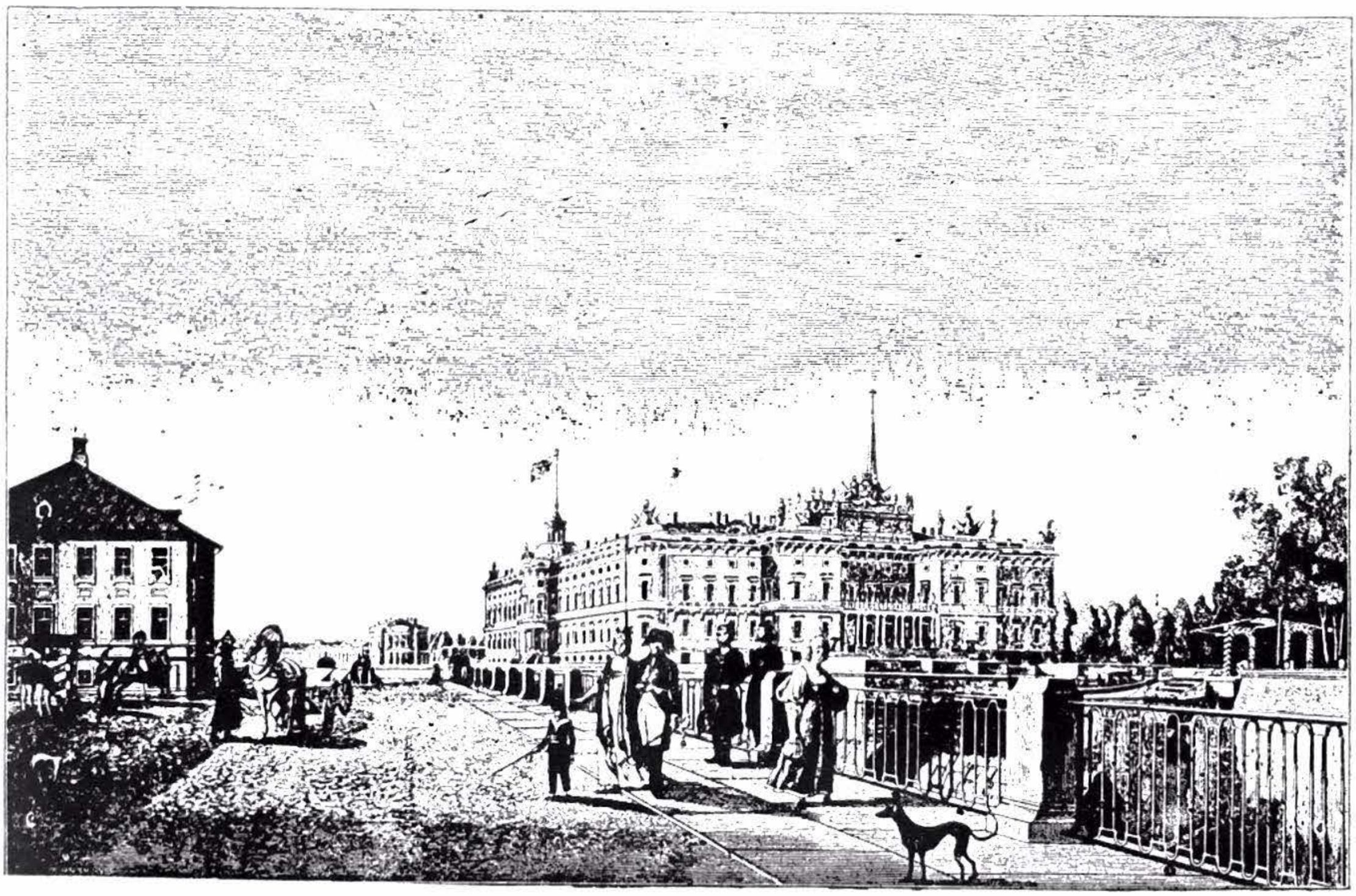
Tsar Alexander I



Alexander 1st at Peterhof Palace

Elder Amphilocius of Rostov

Bishop Innocent of Penza



Mikhailovsky Palace in Petersburg

Kiev Caves Lavra

Elder Parthenius of the Kiev Caves Lavra

Blessed Theophilus of the Kiev Caves

This, together with many other signs and the whole way of life of the Countess, leaves no room to doubt that she (probably in the year 1845) became the *Nun Agnia,* and in this sacred calling drew srtength for her wondrous, virtuous and ascetic life.

Upon hearing of her death, the former Minister of Public Education, Prince Platon A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, wrote the following to Archimandrite Manuel concerning the Countess and her significance:

"We have lost a living, instructive example of ancient Christian piety, so rare in our time, but we have acquired a fervent intercessor before the Throne of God. She will not forget us in the mansions on high, just as here below she did not forget the least of the brethren in Christ who asked her help. Here on the sea of life, stirred by the storm of dangers, her sacred memory will long be a guiding star towards the quiet harbor of salvation. Her virtues, from which one can now remove the covering of modesty without harm to her, will long serve

us as a lesson in piety, the more real in that it resolves what must be the most difficult problem of the union of the strict Christian life and private struggles with the obligations of high position in the world and the proprieties of worldly intercourse."

The anonymous author of the first "Remembrances" of the Countess, writing not long after her death, remarks: "Is it not consoling to see in our century, among contemporary people, a repetition of a distinguishing mark of the first centuries of Christianity? Thus stands Countess Anna before us, by her very name signifying the *grace* that forechose her for the good of the Church! In her person, as it were, one of the two Melanias of Rome has come to life again for us. Those Melanias, burdened both by the fame and the wealth of their ancestors, were weighed down by worldly fame; heeding the preaching of Blessed Jerome and other pious men, they converted their palaces into prayer rooms, closing themselves from the gaze of the importunate world in the secret closet of their home and heart; then they went on pilgrimage to the holy places, there fed the recluses and confessors of Christ's name; and then, to the degree of the increase of spiritual wealth in their souls and their ascent in struggles, they desired to be completely loosed from their immense wealth and to give everything away to the Church and the poor; and just having attained to this exalted poverty, they both ended their days in prayer under the shadow of Bethlehem. Do we not see the features of the remarkable lives of both Roman Melanias in our Russian Melania?"

The distinguishing features of the Countess' character — her flaming faith, humility, piety, and inexhaustible benefactions — cannot remain fruitless examples for any Christian who recognizes the vanity of worldly enjoyments and the unchangeableness of the eternal reward.

May the Lord grant repose to the soul of Countess Anna, the secret Nun Agnia, and number her in the choir of His chosen ones.

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

CONTEMPORARY "AFTER-DEATH" EXPERIENCES IN THE LIGHT OF ORTHODOX TEACHING ON THE AFTERLIFE

3. THE "BEING OF LIGHT"

This experience Dr. Moody describes as "perhaps the most incredible common element in the accounts I have studied, and certainly the element which has the most profound effect upon the individual" (*Life After Life,* p. 45). Most people describe this experience as the appearance of a light which rapidly increases in brightness; and all recognize it as some kind of personal being, filled with warmth and love, to whom the newly-deceased is drawn by a kind of magnetic attraction. The identification of this being seems to depend on one's religious background; in itself it has no recognizable form. Some call it "Christ," others call it an "angel"; all seem to understand that it is a being sent from somewhere to guide them. Here are some accounts of this experience:

"I heard the doctors say that I was dead, and that's when I began to feel as though I were tumbling, actually kind of floating . . . Everything was black, except that, way off from me, I could see this light. It was a very, very brilliant light, but not too large at first. It grew larger as I came nearer and nearer to it" (p. 48).

After another person died he felt himself floating "up into this pure crystal clear light . . . It's not any kind of light you can describe on earth. I didn't actually see a person in this light, and yet it has a special identity, it definitely does. It is a light of perfect understanding and perfect love" (p. 48).

"I was out of my body, there's no doubt about it, because I could see my own body there on the operating room table. My soul was out! All this made me feel very bad at first, but then, this really bright light came. It did seem that it was a little dim at first, but then it was this huge beam . . . At first, when the light came, I wasn't sure what was happening, but then it asked, it kind of asked me if I was ready to die" (p. 48).

Almost always this being begins to communicate with the newly-deceased (more by a kind of "thought-transferrence" than by spoken words); what he "says" to them is always the same thing, which is interpreted by those who experience it as "Are you prepared to die?" or "What have you done with your life to show me?" (p. 47). Sometimes also, in connection with this being, the dying person sees a kind of flashback of the past events of his life. All emphasize, however, that this being in no way offers any "judgment" of their lives or actions; he merely provokes them to reflect on their lives.

Drs. Osis and Haraldsson have also noted some experiences of such a being in their studies, remarking that the experience of light is "a typical quality of other-worldly visitors" (p. 38) and preferring to follow Dr. Moody in calling the beings seen or felt in this light simply as "figures of light" rather than the spiritual beings and deities the dying often identify them as.

Who — or what — are these "beings of light"?

Many call these beings "angels," and point to their positive qualities: they are beings of "light," are full of "love and understanding," and inculcate the idea of "responsibility" for one's life. But the angels known to Orthodox Christian experience are very much more definite, both in appearance and in function, than these "beings of light." In order to understand this, and to begin to see what these "beings of light" may be, it will be necessary here to set forth the Orthodox Christian doctrine of angels, and then to examine, in particular, the nature of the guiding angels of the afterlife.

THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF ANGELS

We know from the words of Christ Himself that the soul is met at death by angels. *And it came to pass that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom* (Luke 16:22).

Concerning the *form* in which angels appear, we know also from the Gospel: *An angel of the Lord (whose) appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow* (Matt. 28:2-3); *a young man arrayed in a white robe* (Mark 16:5); *two men in dazzling apparel* (Luke 24:4); *two angels in white* (John 20:12). Throughout Christian history, the manifestations of angels have always been in this same form of *dazzling youths arrayed in white.* The iconographic tradition of the appearance of angels has also been consistent throughout the centuries, depicting just such dazzling youths (often with wings, which of course are a symbolic feature not usually seen in angelic apparitions); and the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 decreed that angels should always be portrayed only in this way, as men. The "cupids" of the Western art of the Renaissance and later periods are pagan in inspiration and have nothing to do with true angels.

Indeed, not only with regard to the artistic depiction of angels, but in the whole doctrine of spiritual beings, the modern Roman Catholic (and Protestant) West has gone far astray from the teaching of the Scripture and of ancient Christian tradition. An understanding of this error is essential to us if we are to understand the true Christian doctrine of the fate of the soul after death.

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867), one of the great Fathers of recent times, noticed this error and devoted a whole volume of his collected works to exposing it and setting forth the true Orthodox doctrine on this subject (vol. III in the Tuzov edition, St. Petersburg, 1886). In criticizing the views of a standard Roman Catholic theological work of the 19th century (Abbe Bergier, *Dictionnaire de Theologie),* Bishop Ignatius devotes a large part of this volume (pp. 185-

302) to combatting the modern idea, based on the 17th-century philosophy of Descartes, that everything outside the material realm belongs simply to the realm of "pure spirit." Such an idea, in effect, places the infinite God on the same level as various finite spirits (angels, demons, souls of the departed). This idea has become extremely widespread today (although those who hold it do not see its full consequences) and accounts for much of the confusion of the contemporary world regarding "spiritual" things: great interest is shown in everything that is outside the material world, with little distinction often made between what is Divine, angelic, demonic, or simply the result of extraordinary human powers or of the imagination.

Abbe Bergier taught that angels, demons, and the souls of the departed are "perfectly spiritual"; thus they are not subject to laws of time and space, we can speak of their "form" or "movement" only as metaphors, and "they have need to be clothed in a subtle body whenever God permits them to act on bodies" (Bishop Ignatius, vol. 111, pp. 193-5). Even an otherwise knowledgeable 20th-century Roman Catholic work on modern spiritism repeats this teaching, stating, for example, that both angels and demons "can borrow the material required (for becoming visible to men) from a lower nature either animate or inanimate" (Blackmore, *Spiritism Facts and Frauds,* p. 522). Spiritists and occultists themselves have absorbed these ideas from modern philosophy. One sophisticated apologist for supernatural Christianity, C. S. Lewis (an Anglican), properly criticizes the modern "conception of heaven as *merely* a state of mind," but he still seems himself to be at least in part caught up in the modern opinion "that the body, and locality and locomotion and time, now feel irrelevant to the highest reaches of the spiritual life" (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles,* The MacMillan Company, New York, 1967, pp. 164-5). Such views are the result of an over-simplification of spiritual reality under the influence of modern materialism and owing to a loss of contact with authentic Christian doctrine and spiritual experience.

To understand the Orthodox doctrine of angels and other spirits, one must first unlearn the over-simplified modern dichotomy of "matter-spirit"; the truth is more complex than that, and at the same time so "simple" that those who are still capable of believing it will probably be widely regarded as "naive literalists." Bishop Ignatius writes (emphasis added by us): "When God opens the (spiritual) eyes of a man, he is capable of seeing spirits *in their own form*" (p. 216). "Angels, in appearing to men, have always appeared in the form of men" (p. 227). Likewise, "from the Scripture it is clear with all apparentness that the human soul has the form of a man in the body. just like the other created spirits" (p 233). He cites a multitude of Patristic sources to prove this point. Let us, then, look at the Patristic teaching for ourselves.

St. Basil the Great, in his book on the Holy Spirit, states that "in the heavenly powers their nature is that of an aerial spirit — if one may so speak — or an immaterial fire . . . For this reason, they are limited by place, and become visible, appearing to those who are worthy, in the form of their own bodies." Again, "we believe that each (of the heavenly powers) is in a definite place. For the angel who stood before Cornelius was not at the same time with Philip (Acts 10:3; 8:26); and the angel who spoke with Zachariah near the altar of incense (Luke 1:11) did not at the same time occupy his own place in heaven" (chs. 16, 23; Works of St. Basil, Russian edition of Soikin, St. Petersburg, 1911, vol. 1, pp. 608, 622).

Likewise, St. Gregory the Theologian teaches: "Secondary lights after the Trinity, having a royal glory, are the brilliant, invisible angels. They freely go around the great Throne, because they are swiftly-moving minds, a flame, and divine spirits which swiftly transport themselves through the air" (Homily 6, "On the Noetic Beings," in Works of St. Gregory the Theologian, in Russian, Soikin edition, St. Petersburg, vol. 2, p. 29).

Thus, when the Holy Scripture states that God *maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire* (Ps. 103:5; Heb. 1:7), we are not being taught that angels are "pure spir-

its", but rather that they are of a particular substance (if one may so speak) which, although not crudely material as is the human body, still is in a sense "material" and moves in space and time, so that some Fathers do not hesitate to refer to the "aerial bodies" of angels. St. John Damascene, in summing up in the 8th century the teaching of the Fathers before him, states: "Compared with us, the angel is said to be incorporeal and immaterial, although in comparison with God, Who alone is incomparable, everything proves to be gross and material — for only the Divinity is truly immaterial and incorporeal." Again, he teaches: "The angels are circumscribed, because when they are in heaven they are not on earth, and when they are sent to earth by God they do not remain in heaven. However, they are not confined by walls or doors or bars or seals, because they are unbounded. I say that they are unbounded, because they do not appear exactly as they are to the just and to them to whom God wills them to appear. On the contrary, they appear under such a different form as can be seen by those who behold them" (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* II, 3, in The Fathers of the Church, New York, 1958, vol. 37, pp 205-6).

In saying that angels "do not appear exactly as they are," St. Damascene does not, of course, contradict St. Basil, who teaches that angels appear "in the form of their own bodies." Both of these statements are true, as may be clearly seen in numerous manifestations of angels in the Old Testament. Thus, the Archangel Raphael was the travelling companion of Tobias for many weeks without it once being suspected that he was not a man. Yet, when the Archangel revealed himself in the end, he said: *All these days I was visible to you, but I did not eat and drink, but it only seemed thus to you* (Tobit 12:19). The three angels who appeared to Abraham also gave the appearance of eating and were thought to be men (Genesis, chs. 18 and 19). Likewise, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Catechetical Lectures,* instructs us concerning the angel who appeared to Daniel, that "Daniel at the sight of Gabriel shuddered and fell on his face and, prophet as he was, dared not

answer him until the angel transformed himself into the likeness of a son of man" (*Catechetical Lectures* IX, 1, Eerdmans Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. VII, p. 51). Yet, in the book of Daniel (Ch. 10) we read that even in his first dazzling appearance, the angel was also in the form of a man, only with such brightness (*his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze)* as not to be endured by human eyes. Thus, the appearance of an angel is the same as the appearance of a man; but because the angelic "body" is not material and the very sight of its fiery, shining appearance is enough to dumbfound any man still in the flesh, angelic apparitions must of necessity be adapted to the human viewers of them, appearing as less shining and awe-inspiring than they are in reality.

With regard to the human soul also, Blessed Augustine teaches that when the soul is separated from the body, "the man himself who is in such a state, though it be in spirit only, not in body, yet sees himself so like to his own body that he cannot discern any difference whatever" (*City of God,* Book XXI, 10; Modern Library edition, New York, 1955, p. 781). This truth has now been amply confirmed in the personal experiences of perhaps thousands of resuscitated people in our own times.

But if we speak of the "bodies" of angels and other spirits, we must be careful not to ascribe any crudely material characteristics to them. Ultimately, St. John Damascene teaches, "the form and definition of this substance only the Creator understands" (*Exact Exposition,* p. 205). In the West, Blessed Augustine wrote that it is all the same whether we prefer to speak of the "aerial bodies" of demons and other spirits, or simply call them "bodiless" (*City of God,* XXI, 10, p. 781).

Bishop Ignatius himself was perhaps a little too interested in explaining the "bodies" of angels in terms of the 19th-century scientific knowledge of gasses; for this reason a minor dispute arose between him and Bishop Theophan the Recluse, who thought it necessary to emphasize the uncompound nature of spirits (who, of course, are not composed of elemental molecules as are all gasses). On the basic point, however — the

"subtle covering" which all spirits possess — he was in agreement with Bishop Ignatius (see Fr. Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology,* in Russian, Paris, 1937, pp. 394-5). Perhaps some similar misunderstanding on a secondary point or question of terminology was responsible for the opposition which arose in the West in the 5th century when the Latin Father, St. Faustus of Lerins, taught this same doctrine of the relative "materiality" of the soul, based on the teaching of the Eastern Fathers.

If the precise definition of the angelic nature is known to God alone, an understanding of angelic activity (at least in this world) is accessible to everyone, for of this there are many testimonies both in Scripture and in Patristic writings, as well as in the Lives of Saints. To fully understand the manifestations that occur to the dying, we shall have to know in particular how the *fallen* angels (demons) appear. True angels always appear in their own form (only less dazzling than they are in reality), and they act solely in order to carry out the will and commandments of God. Fallen angels, on the other hand, although they appear sometimes in their own form (which St. Seraphim of Sarov described, from his own experience, as "hideous"), usually assume various appearances and perform numerous "miracles" with the powers they have in submission to *the prince of the power of the air* (Eph. 2:2). Their special habitat is the air, and their chief function is to tempt or frighten men and thus drag them to perdition with themselves. It is against them that the struggle of the Christian is directed: *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness under the heavens* (Eph. 6:12).

Blessed Augustine, in his little-known treatise "The Divination of Demons," written when he was asked to explain some of the many demonic manifestations of the ancient pagan world, gives a good general view of the activities of demons:

"The nature of demons is such that, through the sense perception belonging to the aerial body, they readily sur-

pass the perception possessed by earthly bodies, and in speed, too, because of the superior mobility of the aerial body, they incomparably excel not only the movements of men and of beasts but even the flight of birds. Endowed with these two faculties, in so far as they are the properties of the aerial body, namely, with keenness of perception and speed of movement, they foretell and declare many things that they have recognized far in advance. At this, because of the sluggishness of earthly perception, men wonder. The demons too, through the long period into which their life is extended, have gained a far greater experience in events than accrues to men because of the brief span of their lives. Through these faculties, which the nature of the aerial body has allotted, demons not only foretell many things that will occur, but also perform many miraculous acts" ("The Divination of Demons," ch. 3, in The Fathers of the Church, vol. 27, p. 426).

Many of the "miracles" and spectacles of the demons are described in the long discourse of St. Anthony the Great contained in St. Athanasius' Life of him; here also the "lighter bodies" of the demons are mentioned (ch. 11, edition of Eastern Orthodox Books, Willits, Calif., 1976, pp. 19-29). The Life of St. Cyprian the former sorcerer also contains numerous descriptions of demonic transformations and miracles as related by an actual participant in them (see *The Orthodox Word*, 1976, no. 5).

A classic description of demonic activity is contained in the seventh and eighth *Conferences* of St. John Cassian, the great 5th-century Father of Gaul who first transmitted the full teaching of Eastern monasticism in the West. St. Cassian writes: "Such a multitude of evil spirits fills this air which is spread out between heaven and earth and in which they fly in disturbance and not idly, that the Divine Providence for our benefit has hidden and removed them from the gaze of men; otherwise, from fear of their attack, or of the frightful spectacle of the faces into which they are transformed and changed by their own will, whenever they wish, men would be struck with unbearable terror and ready for collapse . . .

"And of the fact that the unclean spirits are governed by the more evil powers and are subject to them, we are instructed, not only by the witness of Holy Scripture, which we read in the description of the Lord's reply to the Pharisees who slandered Him: *"If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons* (Matt. 12:27) — but also by clear visions and many experiences of saints.

"When one of our brethren was travelling in this desert, having found a certain cave after nightfall, he stopped there and wished to perform the evening prayer in it. While he was singing psalms according to custom, the time passed and it was already after midnight. After finishing the rule of prayer, desiring to rest his exhausted body a little, he lay down and suddenly began to see innumerable hordes of demons coming together from all directions; coming in an endless file and a very long row, some preceded their chief, while others followed him. Finally came the prince, who was both taller than all in size and more frightful in appearance. After a throne had been placed, he sat down upon an elevated tribunal and with careful investigation began to examine the activity of each one. Those who said that they had not yet been able to seduce their antagonists he ordered to be banished from his sight with reproof and abuse, as inactive and careless, reproaching them with a roar of rage that they had wasted so much time and labor for nothing. But those who declared that they had seduced those assigned to them he let go with great honors, to the enthusiasm and acclaim of all, as most courageous warriors, glorified as an example for all.

"One most evil spirit from among their number stepped forth and reported with evil joy, as of an illustrious victory, that he had finally conquered a well known monk, whose name he gave, after fifteen years of ceaselessly tempting him, having enticed him this very night into fornication . . . At this report there was extraordinary hilarity among everyone, and he departed, exalted by the high praises of the prince of darkness and crowned with glory. With the approach of dawn, all this multitude of demons vanished from sight." Later the

brother who witnessed this spectacle learned that the report of the fallen monk was indeed true (*Conferences* VIII, 12, 16; Russian translation of Bishop Peter, Moscow, 1892, pp. 313, 315).

Such experiences have occurred to Orthodox Christians right down to the present century. They are clearly not dreams or visions, but waking experiences of the demons as they are in themselves — but only, of course, after one'e spiritual eyes have been opened to see these beings who are normally invisible to human eyes. Until quite recently it was perhaps only a few "old-fashioned" or "simple-minded" Orthodox Christians who could still believe in the "literal truth" of such accounts; even now some Orthodox find them hard to accept, so pervasive has been the modern belief that angels and demons are "pure spirits" and do not act in such "material" ways. Only with the greatly increased demonic activity of recent years do these accounts once again begin to seem at least plausible. Now also the widespread "after-death" experiences have opened up the realm of non-material reality to many ordinary people who have had no contact with the occult, and a coherent and true explanation of this realm and its beings has become one of the needs of the times. Only Orthodox Christianity can supply this explanation, having preserved the authentic Christian doctrine to our own days.

Now let us turn to the encounter with angels in the actual after-death experiences of Orthodox Christians.

(To be continued)

The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God

by Archbishop John Maximovitch

VII. THE ORTHODOX VENERATION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH teaches about the Mother of God that which Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture have informed concerning Her, and daily it glorifies Her in its temples, asking Her help and defense. Knowing that She is pleased only by those praises which correspond to Her actual glory, the Holy Fathers and hymn-writers have entreated Her and Her Son to teach them how to hymn Her. "Set a rampart about my mind, O my Christ, for I make bold to sing the praise of Thy pure Mother" (Ikos of the Dormition). "The Church teaches that Christ was truly born of Mary Ever-Virgin" (St. Epiphanius, "True Word Concerning the Faith"). "It is essential for us to confess that the holy Ever-Virgin Mary is actually Theotokos (Birth-giver of God), so as not to fall into blasphemy. For those who deny that the Holy Virgin is actually Theotokos are no longer believers, but disciples of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, "To John the Monk").

From Tradition it is known that Mary was the daughter of the aged Joachim and Anna, and that Joachim descended from the royal line of David, and Anna from the priestly line. Notwithstanding such a noble origin, they were poor. However, it was not this that saddened these righteous ones, but rather the fact that they did not have children and could not hope that their descendents would see the Messiah. And behold, when once, being disdained by the Hebrews for their barrenness, they both in grief of soul were offering up prayers to God — Joachim on a mountain to which he had retired after the priest did not want to offer his sacrifice in the Temple, and Anna in her own garden weeping over her barrenness —there appeared to them an angel who informed them that they would bring forth a daughter. Overjoyed, they promised to consecrate their child to God.

In nine months a daughter was born to them, called Mary, Who from Her early childhood manifested the best qualities of soul. When She was three

The Zographou Icon OF THE AKATHIST

years old, her parents, fulfilling their promise, solemnly led the little Mary to the Temple of Jerusalem; She Herself ascended the high steps and, by revelation from God, She was led in to the very Holy of Holies, by the High Priest who met Her, taking with Her the grace of God which rested upon Her into the Temple which until then had been without grace. (See the Kontakion of the Entry into the Temple. This was the newly-built Temple into which the glory of God had not descended as it had upon the Ark or upon the Temple of Solomon.) She was settled in the quarters for virgins which existed in the Temple, but She spent so much time in prayer in the Holy of Holies that one might say that She lived in it. (Service to the Entry, second stitcheron on "Lord, I have cried," and the "Glory, Both Now . . .") Being adorned with all virtues, She manifested an example of extraordinarily pure life. Being submissive and obedient to all, She offended no one, said no crude word to anyone, was friendly to

all, and did not allow any unclean thought (abridged from St. Ambrose of Milan, "Concerning the Ever-Virginity of the Virgin Mary").

"Despite the righteousness and the immaculateness of life which the Mother of God led, *sin* and *eternal death* manifested their presence in Her. They could not but be manifested: Such is the precise and faithful teaching of the Orthodox Church concerning the Mother of God with relation to original sin and death" (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, "Exposition of the Teaching of the Orthodox Church on the Mother of God"). "A stranger to any fall into sin" (St. Ambrose of Milan, Commentary on the 118th Psalm), She was not a stranger to sinful temptations. "God alone is without sin" (St. Ambrose, same source), while man will always have in himself something yet needing correction and perfection in order to fulfill the commandment of God; *Be ye holy as I the Lord your God am Holy* (Leviticus 19:2). The more pure and perfect one is, the more he notices his imperfections and considers himself all the more unworthy.

The Virgin Mary, having given Herself entirely up to God, even though She repulsed from herself every impulse to sin, still felt the weakness of human nature more powerfully than others and ardently desired the coming of the Saviour. In Her humility She considered Herself unworthy to be even the servant-girl of the Virgin Who was to give Him birth. So that nothing might distract Her from prayer and heedfulness to Herself, Mary gave to God a vow not to become married, in order to please only Him Her whole life long. Being betrothed to the elderly Joseph when Her age no longer allowed Her to remain in the Temple, She settled in his house in Nazareth. Here the Virgin was vouchsafed the coming of the Archangel Gabriel, who brought Her the good tidings of the birth from Her of the Son of the Most High. *Hail, Thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among women. . . The Holy Spirit shall come upon Thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow Thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be holy, and shall be called the Son of God* (Luke 1:28-35).

Mary received the angelic good tidings humbly and submissively. "Then the Word, in a way known to Himself, descended and, as He Himself willed, came and entered into Mary and abode in Her" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, "Praise of the Mother of God"). "As lightning illuminates what is hidden, so also Christ purifies what is hidden in the nature of things. He purified the Virgin also and then was born, so as to show that where Christ is, there is manifest purity in all its power. He purified the Virgin, having prepared Her by the Holy Spirit, and then the womb, having become pure, conceived Him. He

purified the Virgin while She was inviolate; wherefore, having been born, He left Her virgin. I do not say that Mary became immortal, but that being illuminated by grace, She was not disturbed by sinful desires" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, Homily Against Heretics, 41). The Light abode in Her, cleansed Her mind, made Her thoughts pure, made chaste Her concerns, sanctified Her virginity" (St. Ephraim the Syrian, "Mary and Eve"). "One who was pure according to human understanding, He made pure by grace" (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, "Exposition of the Teaching of the Orthodox Church on the Mother of God").

Mary told no one of the appearance of the angel, but the angel himself revealed to Joseph concerning Mary's miraculous conception from the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-25); and after the Nativity of Christ, with a multitude of the heavenly host, he announced it to the shepherds. The shepherds, coming to worship the new-born one, said that they had heard of Him. Having previously endured suspicion in silence, Mary now also listened in silence and *kept in her heart* the sayings concerning the greatness of Her Son (Luke 2:8-19). She heard forty days later Symeon's prayer of praise and the prophecy concerning the weapon which would pierce Her soul. Later She saw how Jesus advanced in wisdom; She heard Him at the age of twelve teaching in the Temple, and everything She *kept in Her heart* (Luke 2:21-51).

Even though full of grace, She did not yet fully understand in what the service and the greatness of Her Son would consist. The Hebrew conceptions of the Messiah were still close to Her, and natural feelings forced Her to be concerned for Him, preserving Him from labors and dangers which it might seem, were excessive. Therefore She favored Her Son involuntarily at first, which evoked His indication of the superiority of spiritual to bodily kinship (Matt. 12:46-49). "He had concern also over the honor of His Mother, but much more over the salvation of Her soul and the good of men, for which He had become clothed in flesh" (St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on John, Homily 21). Mary understood this and *heard the word of God and kept it* (Luke 11:27, 28). As no other person, She had the same feelings as Christ (Phil. 2:5), unmurmuringly bearing the grief of a mother when She saw Her Son persecuted and suffering. Rejoicing in the day of the Resurrection, on the day of Pentecost She was clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). The Holy Spirit Who descended upon Her *taught (Her) all things* (John 14:26), and *instructed (Her) in all truth* (John 16:13). Being enlightened, She began to labor all the more zealously to perform what She had heard from Her Son and Redeemer, so as to ascend to Him and be with Him.

The end of the earthly life of the Most Holy Mother of God was the beginning of Her greatness. "Being adorned with Divine glory" (Irmos of the Canon of the Dormition), She stands and will stand, both in the day of the Last Judgment and in the future age, at the right hand of the throne of Her Son. She reigns wih Him and has boldness towards Him as His Mother according to the flesh, and as one in spirit with Him, as one who performed the will of God and instructed others (Matt. 5:19). Merciful and full of love, She manifests Her love towards Her Son and God in love for the human race. She intercedes for it before the Merciful One, and, going about the earth, She helps men.

Having experienced all the difficulties of earthly life, the Intercessor of the Christian race sees every tear, hears every groan and entreaty directed to Her. Especially near to Her are those who labor in the battle with the passions and are zealous for a God-pleasing life. But even in worldly cares She is an irreplaceable helper. "Joy of all who sorrow, and intercessor for the offended, and feeder of the hungry, consolation of travellers, harbor of the storm-tossed, visitation of the sick, protection and intercessor for the infirm, staff of old age, Thou are the Mother of God on high, O Most Pure One" (Sticheron of the Service to the Hodigitria). "The hope and intercession and refuge of Christians," "The Mother of God unceasing in prayers" (Theotokion of the Third Tone). "She day and night doth pray for us, and the scepters of kingdoms are confirmed by Her prayers" (daily Nocturne).

There is no intellect or words to express the greatness of Her Who was born in the sinful human race but became "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." "Seeing the grace of the secret mysteries of God made manifest and clearly fulfilled in the Virgin, I rejoice; and I know not how to understand the strange and secret manner whereby the Undefiled has been revealed as alone chosen above all creation, visible and spiritual. Therefore, wishing to praise Her, I am struck dumb with amazement in both mind and speech. Yet still I dare to proclaim and magnify Her: She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle" (Ikos of the Entry into the Temple). "Every tongue is at a loss to praise Thee as is due; even a spirit from the world above is filled with dizziness, when it seeks to sing Thy praises, O Theotokos. But since Thou art good, accept our faith. Thou knowest well our love inspired by God, for Thou art the Protector of Christians, and we magnify Thee" (Irmos of the 9th Canticle, Service of the Theophany).

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